

DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF DARBY LUMBER LANDS PROJECT

ELK HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS AMENDMENT

Direct and Indirect Effects

Under this amendment, none of the drainages inside of the Darby Lumber Lands Project analysis area would decrease in elk habitat effectiveness. All areas will either maintain the current EHE level or move towards meeting the Forest Plan standard. Alternative B would implement a new 0.4 mile road segment but produce a net decrease in roads counting towards EHE. Seven out of thirteen 3rd-order drainages would meet the standard after implementing Alternative B, an improvement of one drainage meeting standard over the existing condition. We will still be meeting related Forest Plan Goals and Objectives.

We have added an elk security analysis (Hillis et al. 1991) to our environmental analysis protocol that has proven to be a better tool than elk habitat effectiveness analysis for achieving the Forest Plan objective to maintain elk populations and hunting season opportunities in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Cumulative Effects

The EHE requirements and levels for the Darby Lumber Lands project are discussed in Wildlife Section in the EA. The understanding of the role EHE played in elk security has changed over the years and is now not thought to be the most important factor in providing effective elk habitat. Since the establishment of the Forest Plan in 1987, seven other similar site-specific amendments of the EHE standard have been made:

Year	Number of 3 rd Order Drainages	Environmental Document	Ranger District
1997	2	Camp Reimel EA	Sula
2001	3	Burned Area Recovery EIS	Darby, Sula, West Fork
2002	5	Slate Hughes Watershed Restoration & Travel Management	West Fork
2008	5	Trapper-Bunkhouse EIS	Darby
2008	2	Haacke Claremont EA	Stevensville
2010	5	Lower West Fork EIS	West Fork
2011	5	Three Saddles EA	Stevensville

The cumulative effect of amending the EHE standard in the Darby Lumber Lands Project analysis area in addition to these previous EHE amendments would be imperceptible at the Forest scale. Many of the 3rd order drainages are within 10 percent of the EHE standard and the Bitterroot Valley elk population is stable. None of the ongoing or reasonably foreseeable future projects listed in PF-NEPA-001 would further reduce EHE in any of the third order drainages within the analysis area. Phase II of Darby Lumber Lands would likely improve the attainment in several 3rd-order drainages that are shared between the two projects. In summary, the proposed actions, in combination with past and reasonably foreseeable future actions in this analysis area, are not expected to cumulatively degrade the habitat effectiveness for elk.

Cumulatively, by implementing this site-specific standard for elk habitat effectiveness, the Darby Lumber Lands project area is expected to have appropriate levels of secure habitat for elk, over time, fully supporting the Forest goals and objectives.

APPLICATION OF FSM 1926.51 “NOT SIGNIFICANT” CRITERIA

Our determination of whether this amendment is significant was done using the process in FSM 1926.51. The handbook states that changes to the land management plan that **are not significant** can result from four specific situations. This site-specific amendment is compared to those situations below:

Changes to the Land Management Plan That are Not Significant	Elk Habitat Effectiveness Standard Amendment
1. Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.	The elk habitat effectiveness amendment does not alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management. The amendment affects a small area of the Bitterroot National Forest (less than 1 percent). This short-term, site-specific project amendment will have no effect on Forest Plan objectives or outputs.
2. Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.	The elk habitat effectiveness amendment does not adjust management area boundaries.
3. Minor changes in standards and guidelines.	The elk habitat effectiveness amendment is a minor change to management area standards based on more recent science.
4. Opportunities for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.	The elk habitat effectiveness amendment allows access to forest areas that are needed for management requirements.

CONCLUSION -- SIGNIFICANCE/NON-SIGNIFICANCE

Based on consideration of the four factors identified in FSM 1926.51, and considering the Forest Plan in its entirety, the adoption of the elk habitat effectiveness amendment to the Bitterroot National Forest Plan is not significant. This amendment is fully consistent with, but further refines and clarifies the means to achieve, current Forest Plan goals and objectives.